Methodism at the Corner of Asia

Series C

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1907

MALAY PENINSULA

Begun at Singapore in 1885, by Drs. Thoburn and Oldham, both now bishops, the Malaysia Mission at present has three districts, of which the Singapore district includes the work in Borneo, Java, and Sumatra.

The educational opportunity in the Straits Settlements and in the Malay States of the Peninsula, is amazing. The government subsidizes any school that will do acceptable work in suitable premises. Thus great schools can be carried on without expense to the Missionary Society. The missionaries in these English-teaching schools have admirable opportunities for Christian work among the boys, of whom about 3,000 are enrolled. These boys scatter all over Southeastern Asia and the East Indies, and prepare the way for future advances. Calls are coming from many places to follow up the work. The enrollment in the girls' school approaches 1,000.

The Tamil and Chinese churches are rarely large, because of the migratory character of the people, it being estimated that twenty per cent of the membership is lost by removal each year. Those migrating oftentimes start churches in new communities, and then send for pastors or teachers.

Probably nowhere on earth does diversity of race and speech present such obstacles to missionary progress. The missionaries, however, are seizing all strategic points, and are learning the languages. The population is gradually becoming more stable. Practically every station shows advance in membership. The mission press at Singapore sends out leaflets, tracts, periodicals, and Scripture portions in various languages.

BORNEO

Borneo is as large as six New York States with an Ohio to spare. The great island is peopled principally by Malays, Dyaks and Chinese.

The Methodist Episcopal Church has a well-developed field in Sarawak, where the work among the Chinese colonists has had a romantic beginning and a most successful development. Believing that Christian colonists were of most value in developing the country, the Rajah loaned a large sum of money to bring down from China a colony of Chinese Christians. About 600 of these were Methodists and must be cared for by the Malaysia Conference. Industrial work has been opened here by the setting out of rubber plants, cocoanut trees, and pepper gardens.

At two different places in West Borneo work was started through native efforts, the missionaries being sent for to organize activities already under way. At one of these places the work was opened by a Malaysian convert, a doctor who was anxious to extend the borders of the Kingdom. He gathered a company of over fifty believers, and the presiding elder in 1902 went over and organized them into a Methodist Church. At the other point the merchants raised $7,000 for a church and school and guarantee the salary of a native preacher and teacher.

Among the Dyaks of Borneo Christianity is causing the disappearance of slavery, bondage, headhunting, cannibalism, human sacrifices, barbaric punishments, feasts, immorality, sorcery, drunkenness, and gambling, even in places where the government has been unable to do away with any of these evils.

JAVA AND SUMATRA

Java, one of the Dutch East Indies, comprises a territory a little larger than that of the state of New York, and has a population of 35,000,000 people. The inhabitants include Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese and others, besides Europeans, mostly Dutch. Methodist work was begun in 1905 under circumstances little less than romantic. The missionary who opened the work, when a student in the United States, had been one of the earliest and most aggressive promoters of the missionary movement among the young people of Methodism. After a number of years spent as a missionary in the Malay Peninsula, he felt very strongly drawn toward Java, and sought the opportunity to extend Methodist activities to that great island. It was the consensus of opinion among the Malaysia missionaries that openings could be found for work in Java only after long and tedious siege work. Mr. Denyes was finally permitted, however, to go to Java to make the start. Within six months after his arrival in the island two churches had been organized, and beginnings had been made at a number of other places.

Sumatra is almost four times as large as New York State, and has a population of 2,500,000. A beginning of Methodist activities was made in 1905. This work was brought to us through a non-Christian Chinaman who had opened a school in Medan, and wishing to attend to other business for a few months, he offered it to our missionary at Penang. We took the school, and, as a result, we have an organized church, have had several baptisms, and have won the confidence of the community. All this without spending a dollar of missionary money, as the school pays all the expenses.

In the fall of 1906 this was the situation in the provinces or parts of Luzon assigned by the Evangelical Union of the Philippine Islands to the Methodist Episcopal Church:

Cagayan Valley, 250,000 people, no missionary, but already 200 members, and the most urgent calls from all parts. Ilocos Sur, 100 miles long, has 150,000 people, 1,000 members, one missionary family. Pangasinan, 450,000 people, 4,263 members, one missionary family. Tarlac, 135,000 people, 1,546 members, one missionary family. Pampanga, 225,000 people, 1,925 members, one missionary family. Bulacan and Nueva Ecija, 200,000 people, 2,386 members, one missionary family. Manila and surrounding districts, 500,000 people, two missionaries who must do the work of presiding elder, pastor, editor, and publishing agent.

From mountain valleys and distant villages committees and companies come to the missionaries asking for teachers and preachers, and the missionaries can only say that time and strength can endure no more. A dozen missionaries gathered in the last Annual Conference. By this group is done the work of evangelization, organization, training and reproving, for there are none others to translate Christian literature, teach and locate and supervise and train and baptize and marry and bury, but this handful of men who throw themselves into the task with utter abandon.

The membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church six years after beginning work in the islands is 17,000. More missionaries and far better property equipment are greatly needed if the urgent calls and unprecedented opportunities are to be met.

THE OUTLOOK

In Malaysia

The problem is the regeneration of at least 40,000,000 people ranging in civilization all the way from the barbarous headhunters to the cultured but godless European merchant. The three great difficulties are: (1) the great number of languages (more than fifty languages are spoken on the streets of Singapore); (2) the various false religions, from the most primitive fetich worship to the complex systems of India and China; (3) the trying climate.

In the Philippines

Twenty-five recruits are needed at once from home, and temporary support for at least five Filipino evangelists. Two hundred and fifty dollars will support one of these Filipinos a year.

The influence of a large church building, such as we need in Manila, will reach to the farthest point of our work, as people from all the provinces visit Manila and receive their impressions of Protestantism from what they see here. There is also urgent need of added means for the training of an indigenous ministry. $20,000 more is needed for the Filipino Church; $20,000 for missionary homes; $10,000 toward the American Church in Manila; and $10,000 to $15,000 for a Bible Training School.

Published by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church. First edition of 50,000 printed in January, 1907; second edition of 50,000 printed in March, 1907.

Sample copies free. Price of this leaflet, 40 cents per 100; 100 of each of the series, $1.50. Orders should be sent to the Open Door Commission, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.